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Jersey Indian Lore—

Language of the Lenapes

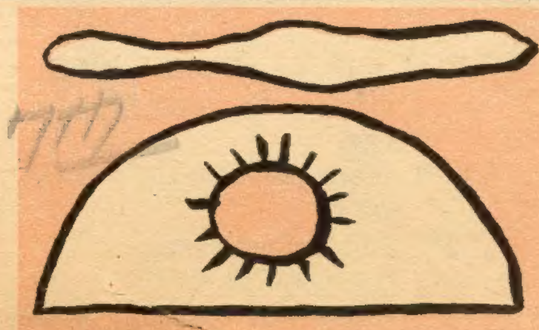
Jersey Redman Had Limited Vocabulary; Picture Writing Recorded History of Tribes

BY CHARLES A. PHILHOWER

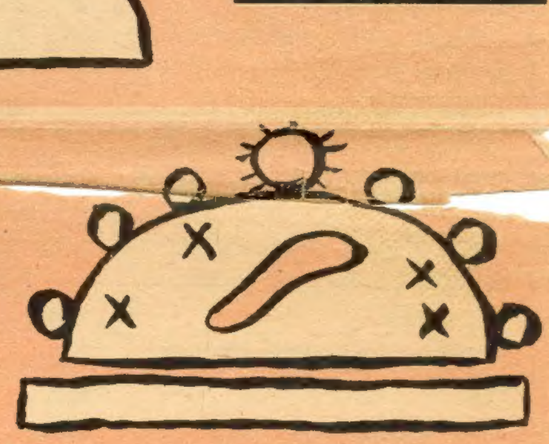
MANY places in New Jersey, as well as rivers, lakes and mountains, derive their names from the language of the Indians who long ago roamed the state.

The language of a primitive people must first be considered as spoken and not written. The Lenapes had no alphabet, hence they could not record their thoughts in writing. However, records were made by means of picture writing.

One narrative known as the red score or Walum Olum tells of wanderings of the Indians to the East from a far western land. There are some 74 signs or pictographs by which this account is presented. These were collected and interpreted by Constantine Samuel Rafinesque, a French scholar, and published in Volume I of the "American Nation 1836." He was at that time professor of historical and natural science in Transylvania University, Kentucky. The first six graphic signs in this record are interpreted as follows:

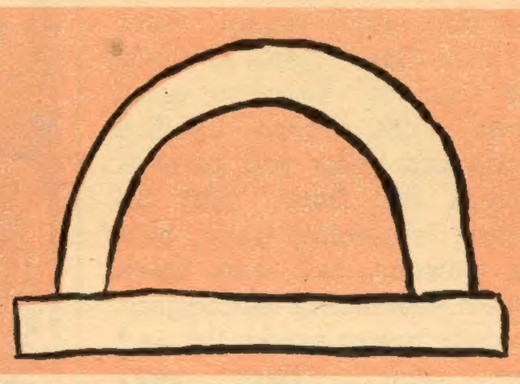


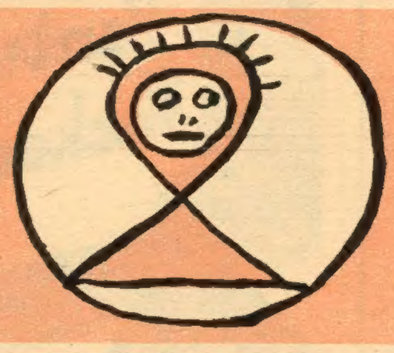
He made the sun, the moon, and the stars.



He made them all move evenly.

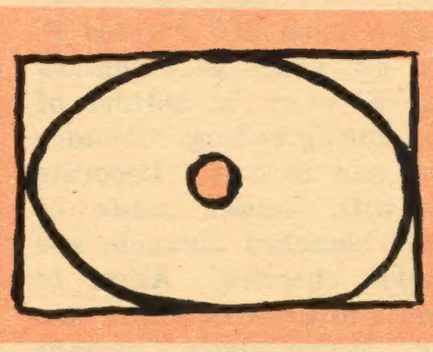
At first in that place, at all times above the earth.

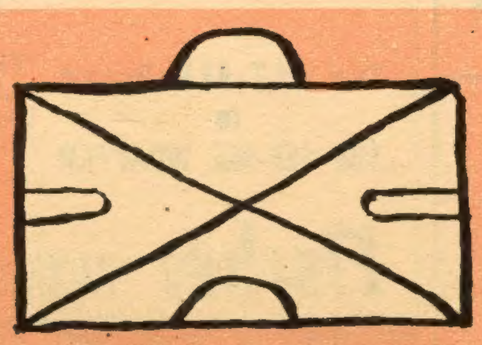




On the earth was an extended fog, and there the Great Manitto was.

At first forever lost in space, everywhere the Great Manitto was.





He made the extended land and the sky.

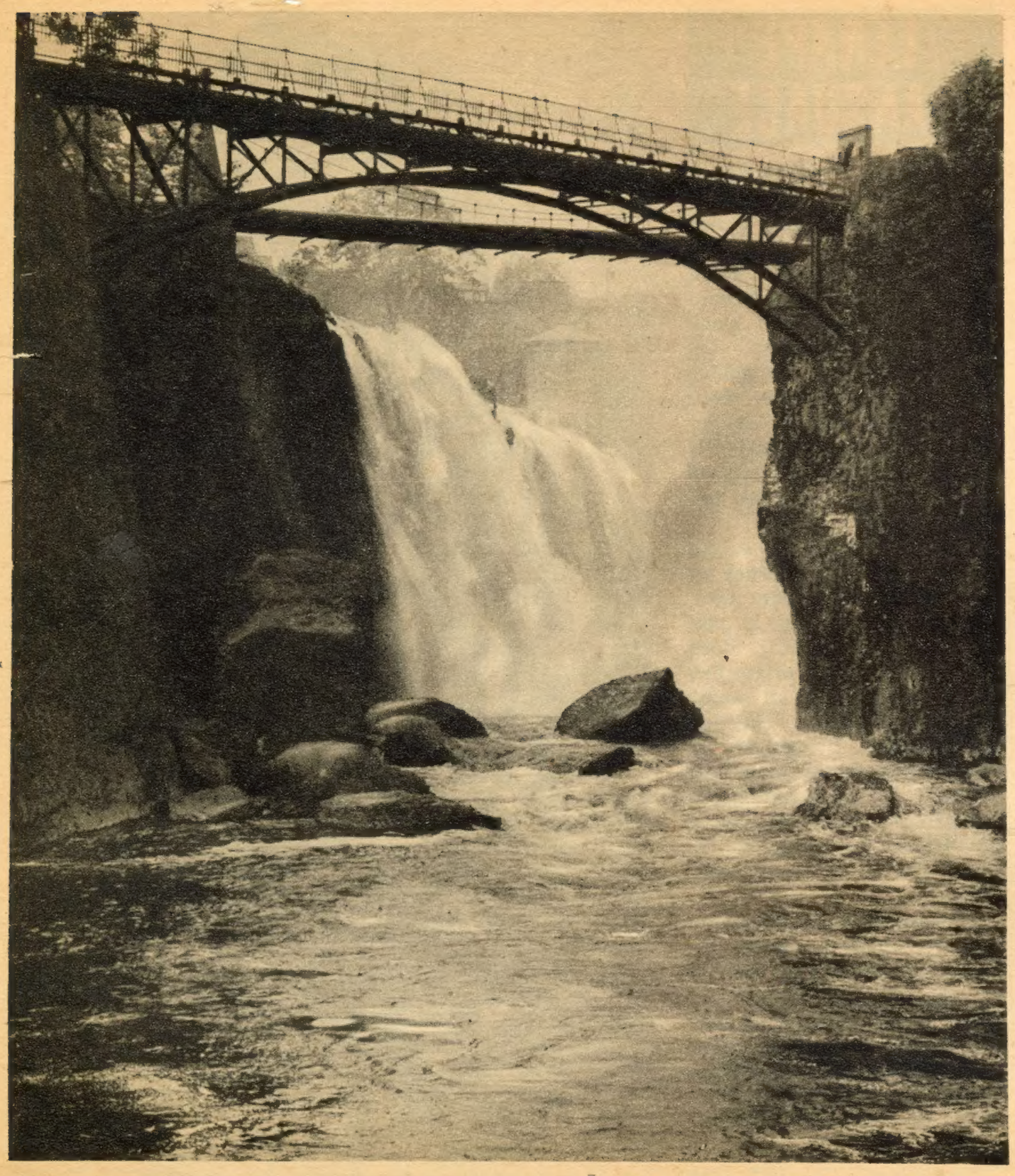
IN that manner the great Indian epic is presented in a series of pictographs giving in ancient style an account of the universe; of its creator (The Great Manitto), and the early historic migrations of the Lenapes. These characters are etched in red on white birch bark, hence the name red score. Refinesque saw them and made copies of the signs. The originals apparently have disappeared.

Similar pictographs have been found on gorgets such as the Lenape stone, on pendants, on ceremonials and on stone tablets found occasionally in New Jersey and in the Delaware Valley.

The speech of the Lenapes was often made up of long and complicated words. These words were called polysynthetic since they were a combination of many ideas. The language also was characterized as agglutination which meant that the speaker would run many words together into one in order to express his thoughts. An Indian village in Hunterdon County was called Essakauquemenshehickon. This meant that the place was so stony that it was hard to dig the ground. Literally, "You live place stony tough ground." A visitor to an Indian wigwam once overheard a child say to a puppy: "Kiligatschis," meaning "give me your little paw." These long lines of syllables exemplify combinations of ideas embodied obviously in a single word. Otherwise expressed, a sentence in a word of syllabic ideas.

Students of the Jersey Indian language divide it into two dialects, Munsee and Lenape. The latter embodies the Unami and Unalachtigo, which in turn includes the Nanticoke. The Shawnee also was closely allied but is generally classified as Eastern Algonquin.

In the Lenape, the earliest example of the language is a translation of the Lord's Prayer from Swedish into the Unalachtigo tongue by John Campanius about 1645. He used an "r" in his translation even though the sound was a slightly trilled "w." Ziesberger in 1776 gave a translation of the Lord's Prayer from German into Munsee. Here is the first



Falls of the Passaic, variations of which include "Pishawack" and "Pachsajak."

statement of the prayer, "Our Father who art in heaven," given in both dialects for comparison:

Unalachtigo (Campanius) —"Nawk nirawna chir wani hawritt mochyrick Hocquaessing appin," literally "Father our who dwells up high in the heavens there."

Munsee (Zeisberger)—"Ki wetochemellenk talli epian awossagame," "Thou who art our Father there dwelling beyond the clouds."

ONE Lenape root word had many variations such as: Ochquechum, a female animal; ochquehellan, a female bird; ochquetit, a little girl, and ochque u, a woman.

Conversation in the Munsee would run like this: "Kee squa og enychan hatah?" (Thou wife and children hast?) "Mogy." (Yes.) "Katcha Hatah?" (How many hast?) "Neo, Nisha benointid og nisha squatin." (Four, two little boys and two little girls.)

It must be remembered that a language having no written form develops many variations in the several words that make up its vocabulary. This is especially true when the written record of its words has been made through the medium of different languages such as German, French, Dutch, Swedish, Finnish and English. Indian words have been given us through all these tongues. An oral language is also subject to many variations growing out of the caprices of the persons using it. Furthermore, speech hindrances and defects in hearing complicated the situation for both those who spoke the language and those who heard it. Growing out of such difficulties, some 26 variants of the word Passaic are noted from "pishawack" and "pachsajek" to the present spelling.

Besides these, other difficulties developed. Some words said to be Indian are in fact Dutch. For example the word "zeewan" used by the Indians for wampum beads originated from the Dutch "zee" for sea, and "wan" for fan or sea fan, a shell, referring particularly to the hen clam or "quohog." The Indian added the locative ending from his language, "hacky," so he would say "zeewanhacky," meaning "a place where shells are found."

DIFFERENT ways were used in naming animals and objects that were new to him. In the case of the chicken he took the Dutch word "kip" and called the bird "tipitit," changing the "k" to a "t" and using the Indian diminutive "tit." With the cow he imitated the call and knew the animal as "moo," and the calf as "mootit."

Some of the Dutch settlers were greedy in seizing all the lands they could get. The Indian naturally did not like this and the opprobrious word that he hit upon was "swynakin" or "swanakin," taken from the Dutch word "swyn" meaning hog.

Ziesberger, the Moravian missionary, wrote an Indian grammar in German that was translated by Duponcean into English. Brinton and Anthony, the latter a Unami tribesman, compiled a dictionary. This book is made up of about 5,000 words and there are nearly as many more in deeds, documents and place names that baffle the student by way of interpretation. Some are simple. Others, after study, are easy to understand. Many can be positively analyzed and many more have no clue by which to interpret them.

Alltogether there are some 50 volumes written in the Delaware Indian language which includes the Lenape, so the language is preserved to considerable extent. It should be stated here that almost without exception Indian place names that have r's in them are not purely Indian. It was a common practice of the Dutch and Swedes to substitute r's for l's, n's and w's, especially the latter when a slight guttural or trill was observed in the oral word.

(Continued on Following Page)

This is the seventh in a series of articles about the Indians who once populated this state, written especially for The Newark Sunday News Magazine by Charles A. Philhower, authority on Indian lore. In subsequent articles Mr. Philhower will tell how Lenni Lenapes governed themselves and left their influence on New Jersey.

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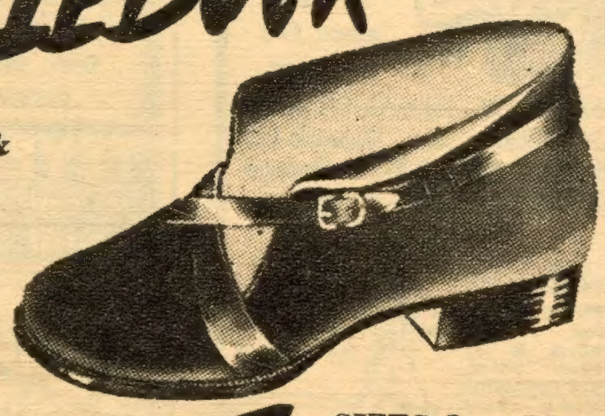

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LENAPE LANGUAGE

(Cont'd from Preceding Page)

A WORD which may puzzle one at first but which becomes easy to interpret when given some thought is Secaucus. The Indian for black snake is "sukachgook." C's and g's are interchangeable gutturals, hence the word could just as well be "sekaucus." It is known today as "Snake Hill" and the snakes there in the trap rock are black snakes.

For many years the origin of the name Hacklebarney as used for the state park near Pottersville has been a puzzler. At first sight it does not suggest Indian origin but it now seems that all doubt has been dispelled. "Hackle" is probably a variant of "haki" meaning ground and "barney" is a variation of "bonihen," to put wood on a fire. Hence "hakiboni," to put wood on a fire on the ground, a bonfire.

The question has arisen frequently, where do we get the name for Dockwatch Hollow in the second Watchungs north of Martinsville? Again the answer is Indian origin. In Fenwick's Salem vocabulary is the word "dogwatch" with the meaning "cold." Hence "Dockwatch Hollow" is "cold hollow." It has this appropriate name since a cold current of air is always noticeable even in mid-Summer. There are many places in Jersey known as Cold Hollow but this seems to be the only one where the Indian name has persisted.

A word of interest to the Montclair area is "Nishnane." It has three syllables and the accent is on the middle one. The meaning is "second" and should apply to the whole reach of the Second River. The first river should be called "Netami" and the third River has its Indian name Yanticaw.

A LARGE island in Sussex County in the Delaware River below Port Jervis is known by the Indian name Mashipacong. The Indian word from which it is derived is "Machsippucong." "Mach" meaning "big;" "sippu," "river," and "cong," "place," consequently, the big river place. When the river is in high flood the island is covered, making its width nearly a mile at this point, hence big river. Some of the old residents to this day never speak of the main part of the river as the Delaware but as "The Big River," Machsippucong. The root "sippu" is found in the name "Sopus" Indians, River Indians of the Hudson, and it should be noted that when the Lenape migrated eastward they left behind the name for the Father of Waters, Mississippi.

While most of the Indian place names of the state are long and awkward to pronounce, there are some that are simple to say and easily understood. For instance, Watchung, the name of the mountains north of the Raritan River. It comes from "watchu," "high;" "ung," location, meaning "high hill." Peapack, a town in Somerset County, is derived from "pee" or "bee," water; "ack" or "acky," a locative meaning "water place."

Singac, near Paterson, means "sing" for ridge and "ack" a locative, or "falls in river."

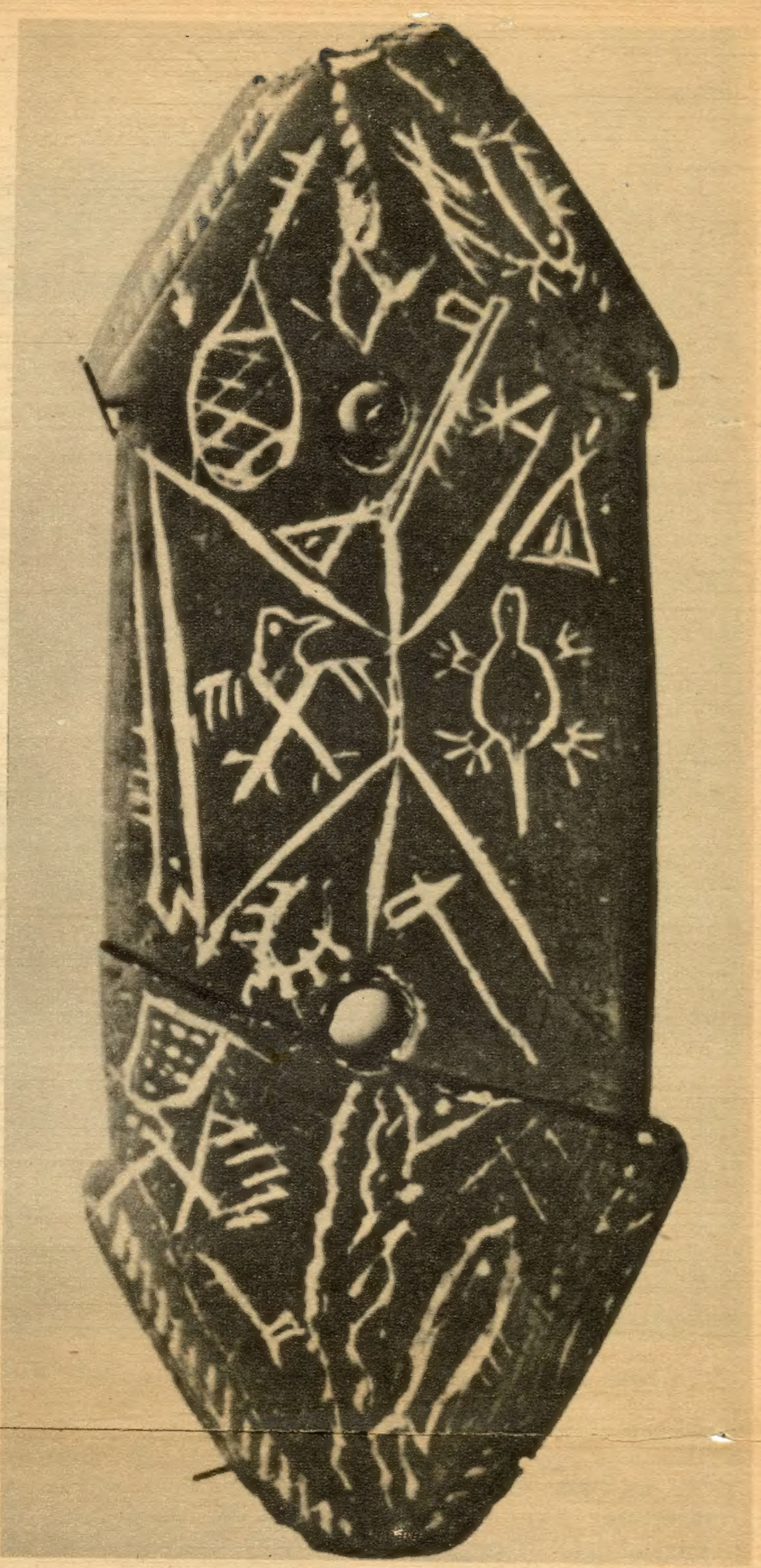
Topenemus, a stream in Monmouth County, was so called because "Topen" means frost and "mus" another form of location. So it is "place of first frost."

Owassa, a lake in Sussex County, gained its name from "Owossachtenne," "beyond the hill" and applied to the lake means "lake beyond the hill."

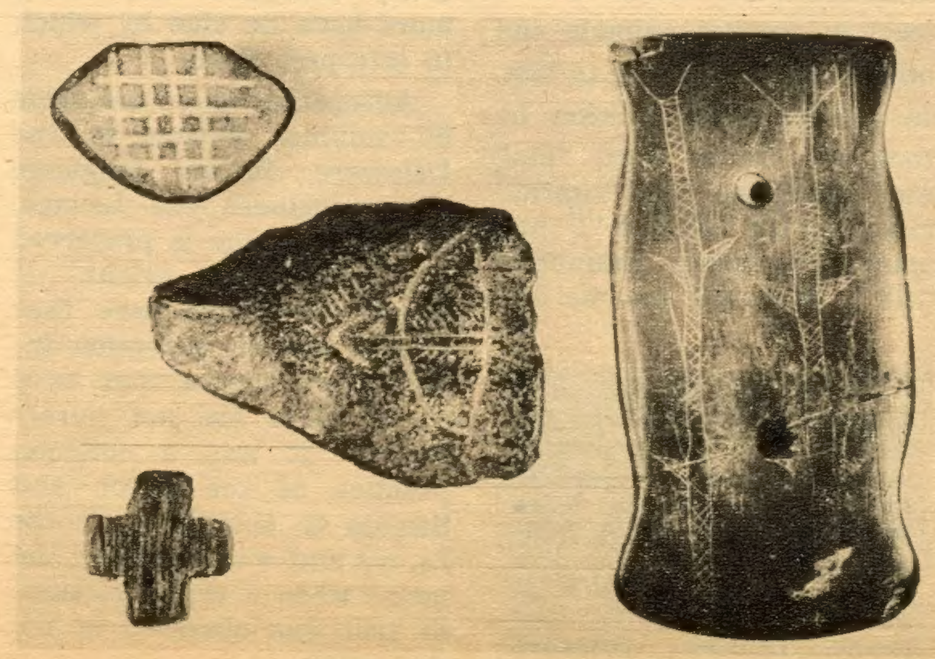
"Wickatunk," a town in Monmouth, meant "Wicka" or Indian house and "tunk," also a locative, so therefore "place of Indian house."

"Longacoming," old name of Egg Harbor City, was in fact "lonaconing," meaning "where many paths or many waters meet."

NEXT WEEK: Legends and amusements of the Lenni Lenapes.



One of gorgets showing totems of Lenape tribes.



Decorative stones found along Delaware Valley.